

AFTERNANJING

IS THE THRILL OF BEING AN OLYMPIAN WORTH THE SACRIFICE FOR THESE YOUNG ATHLETES?



# Champions asked if chasing dream worth it

**T**here was a curious theme to questioning on Monday night at the final Chat with Champions session of the Nanjing 2014 Youth Olympic Games. Is it really worth it, chasing the Olympic dream?

No one said it in as many words, but the sentiment was clear.

“Have you ever wanted to quit?”

“Do you regret not having more of a childhood?”

Another posed the question, “How could you continue in sport but still have an actual, adult life?”

“When you stand on the Olympic podium and you get to see your flag and hear your anthem, those sacrifices are well worth it to experience those moments,” swimmer Kirsty Coventry of Zimbabwe said.

She was joined on the panel by triple canoe slalom gold medalist Tony Estanguet of France and Italian Simone Farina, the former professional soccer player who

blew the whistle on an Italian match-fixing scandal in 2011.

The overwhelming sentiment of the panel was that yes, becoming an Olympian is well worth the sacrifices, but Estanguet said it was vital that athletes were clear about what they are trying to achieve.

“I encourage you to maybe better define your project and make sure you are firm in your activity and in your life. If you feel too much pressure or too many constraints, it’s maybe because your project is not well defined,” he said.

The Sydney 2000, Athens 2004 and London 2012 Olympic Games gold medalist also said athletes need to strive for more than just gold medals.

“At the end, trust me, what you

remember, it’s not only the medals, it’s also the memories, all you have shared with your coach and with your teammates. After retiring I remember more the stories than the results,” Estanguet said.

Earlier, Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008 backstroke gold medalist Coventry was asked if being an athlete automatically means you are a role model, and she was in no doubt.

“You don’t have a choice about being a role model. You’re all going to be role models when you get home. The only choice you guys have is if you’re going to be a good one or a bad one,” she said.

Coventry and Estanguet finished their night by completing the ice bucket challenge, raising funds for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis research.

“I’ve paddled in some really cold rivers, so I didn’t think it would be a big challenge, but it was really cold,” Estanguet said.

— YOUNG REPORTERS PROGRAM



**XU QINYU,**

15, one of the image ambassadors of the YOG and a volleyball player

“My dream is getting admitted to a reputable university and have a happy family in the future. I also dream that people around the world can learn from each other when they pursue and fulfill their own dreams. We are not dreaming of competition, but of communication.”



**LIANG XIAOJING,**

17, gold medalist in the women’s 100m from Guangdong province

“My dream is to be able to compete against the world’s best sprinters on the highest possible stage at future world championships or even the Olympics. For me, to prove that Chinese or Asians can run at a high level is kind of a fulfillment of Chinese dreams. I will work hard to reach that goal and hopefully qualify for the 2016 Rio Olympics.”



**HUANG JIANGANG,**

17, 400-meter runner from Chinese Taipei

“My aim is to be a track and field coach for junior athletes or to be a physical education teacher in schools. You can’t run for a lifetime as a professional so it’s good to shift your focus early to a career after sports. I just hope to see more sports exchanges across the Straits. That may help make Taiwan and the mainland closer.”



**SAYORI MATSUMOTO,**

17, Japanese female walker

“My dream is to visit as many countries as possible and to be able to meet my idol, Usain Bolt (Jamaican Olympic champion sprinter). I also have had the chance to meet a lot of athletes from different countries and make friends with some of them. So, part of my dream has come true.”